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FRENCH REACTION TO VIET-MINH OFFENSIVE

I. Official French Reaction:

A. In cabinet meeting, 30 December 1953.

1. Finance Minister Edgar Faure reportedly insisted that France either obtain a five-power conference on the Far East or open negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.

2. Secretary for the Associated States Jacquet told American officials that in the cabinet

meeting Reynaud recommended the immediate adoption of a policy of withdrawal from Indochina.

Jacquet said only exceptional efforts by himself, Bidault and Pleven blocked Reynaud's move.

B. *Subsequently,*
~~In the meantime,~~ however, Reynaud sent his executive secretary to the American embassy to explain his position. According to his spokesman, Reynaud favors evacuation only as a last

State Department review completed

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resort. Moreover, the vice premier is strongly opposed to any direct negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. Reynaud is, however, in favor of exploring every possibility of negotiations on the international level, preferably as part of any Korean political conference or failing in that, through a five-power conference. Until negotiations are possible "under at least potentially favorable conditions," however, he supports prosecution of the war under the Navarre plan.

- C.B. 1. Jacquet told the American embassy in Paris on 5 January that unless "a precise plan for action" in Indochina were presented within three to six months, public pressure would not permit the National Assembly to support any government not offering a prompt solution.
2. He sees three hypotheses in regard to a settlement of the Indochina war.

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2. Negotiations at the international level including Communist China.

3. A military solution which can only be obtained with "massive military assistance" of its allies.

4. Negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.

Jacquet does not believe it is possible for France to choose "unilaterally" one of these three possibilities.

The embassy does not feel that he favors asking for American troops. If that is so, his second hypothesis (2' above) apparently refers to financial and material

aid to carry out the Navarre plan.

II. French Press Reaction:

Press reaction to the Viet-Minh offensive comes mainly from independent leftist papers. In general, they pose the following questions in regard to French Indochina policy.

A. If negotiations are possible in Korea, why not in Indochina?

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- B. If the Viet Minh terms make negotiations impossible, why can't France provoke internationalization of the conflict?
- C. Why should France continue to remain the exclusive champions of the defense of the free world?

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Background

It was the Jacquet opinion (A.2 above), earlier offered to the American columnist Joseph Alsop, that appeared in American papers as a statement that the National Assembly would insist on the recall of the French expeditionary force unless allied reinforcements were provided "within the next three to six months."

Jacquet quoted Alsop as saying that if United States troops were sent to Indochina, he "wanted to take part in the campaign."

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